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SUBJECT: CORRUPTION AND STRUGGLE FOR LEGITIMACY UNDERMINING SECURITY
GAINS IN SOUTHERN KAPISA

REF: KABUL 1233

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Now that military operations have compelled insurgents to withdraw, at least for now, from much of southern Kapisa, and GIROA authority has been reasserted, corruption and a struggle for political legitimacy have emerged as obstacles to enduring stability. The uneasy balance between traditional community structures, which reserve power and influence for malek tribal members and village elders, and the need to incorporate former jihadi fighters and commanders into a new model has splintered communities, polarized political rivals and created opportunities for the abuse of political status. These broader questions will not be resolved by the creation of "unified" shuras or even elections but will have to be adequately addressed before lasting peace and stability can be realized. GIROA must also begin tackling corruption in order to build community trust and the authority to engage leaders in frank dialogue regarding the roles and responsibilities of various community leaders. END SUMMARY.

Tagab

2. (SBU) With a significantly increased and sustained ANSF presence over the past two years, security in Tagab district has improved markedly. The local population appears to trust the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) to keep the peace, and their focus has for now shifted from security concerns to governance and development. Problematically, as the security situation has stabilized, the political situation has become increasingly fractured, illustrated by the breakdown of the main community body, the shura, into five individual shuras competing for power. Their struggle highlights a deeper issue that is likely to be further exacerbated as reconciliation efforts proceed in previously contested areas: communities no longer agree on where legitimate authority lies.

3. (SBU) In Tagab, former commanders who were heavily involved in the conflicts of the past 30 years do not feel their contributions are adequately recognized by traditional structures and so have refused to participate in efforts to establish a unified shura unless they are given significant leadership roles. This runs contrary to the local, traditional shura structure, dominated by maleks and village elders who believe their role in creating the conditions for improved security and GIROA support firmly establishes them as today's legitimate local leaders.

4. (SBU) Competition for power has exacerbated an already serious corruption problem, as no one has sufficient community backing to oppose it. Those government officials who should be stamping out corruption are often believed to be the perpetrators of abuse. Reports of illegal transfers of government lands by the former Tagab district administrator to political allies of the governor; Hezb-i-Islami (HIG)-led contractor "mafias" that do not allow outsiders to bid on development projects; and political intimidation by the governor and HIG networks are all common. Residents of Tagab routinely cite corruption and legal impunity as the issues that

separate the government from the people. When asked who could break the cycle of corruption, especially considering the alleged role GIROA officials often play, residents offer little more than a frustrated sigh, indicating they do not know who, if anyone, has the authority to do so.

Alasai

15. (SBU) In neighboring Alasai, where military operations in March helped reestablish the GIROA presence, residents seem generally satisfied with their new district administrator. However, while community bodies like the traditional shura and the District Development Assembly (DDA) continue to function, divisions are developing. The deputy DDA chief, with support from GIROA-backed HIG associates, is currently attempting to either remove or sideline the DDA chief in violation of procedures. Competing claims to power have encouraged the polarization of the populace, with the governor, district administrator and their HIG associates on one side and the National Directorate of Security (NDS), DDA and Jemiat-i-Islami supporters on the other. (NOTE: As there are few Tajiks living in southern Kapisa, these political power struggles do not generally have an ethnic component but rather play out within Pashaie and Pashtun communities. END NOTE). While the Jemiat side accuses the government of corruption, the HIG side accuses Jemiat of ineptitude - an inability to deliver services to the people and lack of community support and recognition.

16. (SBU) Under these circumstances, ongoing reconciliation efforts in Alasai are likely to produce yet another crop of individuals demanding a seat at the table. Factions already are struggling for the limited space available, and further competition will strain the

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already tense political environment. The situation is all the more worrying because of the guns held by political leaders and the armed groups allied to them. This applies to both HIG and Jemiat, but HIG is stronger and better equipped. Even granting that HIG the political party is an accepted political player, in Kapisa the distinction between the party and HIG the armed faction is not always clear.

Comment

17. (SBU) Tagab and Alasai districts appear to be suffering a "perfect storm" of problems. What makes their saga relevant is that the elements making for that storm are present in many other places in the country -- if not always in this particularly destructive combination. First, the central government institution responsible for trying to ensure good governance is being undercut by the direct access by the chief government figure in the province, the governor, to President Karzai, whose interaction with the governor appears influenced by the President's re-election strategy. A second problem is the failure of the traditional power structure in these districts to find a way to come to terms with the demands of powerful non-traditional power-holders, leading to a splintering of groups claiming power and authority. Here again the national election appears to be exacerbating the situation. Added to the mix is the underlying, longstanding rivalry between two major political factions in the area, Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat. The two sides' links to armed groups make their rivalry all the more concerning. Finally, the absence of either formal or informal authority seen as legitimate leaves corruption unchecked. That corruption works like a cancer on even the best of GIROA intentions to link the people to Kabul.

18. (SBU) The upcoming Provincial Council elections in Kapisa are unlikely to settle these broader conflicts. Beyond the disillusionment with executive branch GIROA officials, there is also widespread recognition that the only elected officials within the province, namely members of the Provincial Council (PC), have little power or authority to challenge non-elected officials like Governor Abu Baker. People do not see these elected officials as capable of addressing their problems. PC members themselves admit they are unable to help constituents or deliver projects, as they have little

influence over the governor or line ministry directors. Given their irrelevance and lack of authority, not surprisingly they are not direct participants in the power struggles in southern Kapisa, struggles which will continue to play out regardless of who wins the election. This has not, however, prevented the murder in recent days of a Provincial Council candidate.

19. (SBU) The cautionary tale of southern Kapisa is just a repeat of one we have heard before -- that hard-won security gains by military means are unlikely to be decisive unless underlying power struggles are addressed, legitimate authority at both the formal and informal levels are established, and corrosive corruption is stemmed.

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